

L-amino acid oxidase with cytotoxic activity from *Aplysia punctata*

Description

5

The present invention relates to a cytotoxic polypeptide which is an L-amino acid oxidase isolated from the ink of the sea hare *Aplysia punctata*.

10

The sea hare *Aplysia* produces a pink-coloured ink, which has cytotoxic activity towards several eukaryotic cell lines. WO97/16457 discloses a partial sequence from an *Aplysia* protein, which allegedly has anti-tumor activity. Cyplasin L (558 aa, NCBI accession number 11967690) and cyplasin S (421 aa, 11967688; Petzelt and Werner, 2001, Cell Biology International, 25(2):A23) both include parts of sequences disclosed in WO 97/16457. Cyplasin S exhibits 95% sequence identity to cyplasin L. Cyplasin L is produced in the nidamental gland but neither in the ink gland (including the mantle region) nor in the opaline gland of *Aplysia punctata*. Thus, it is concluded that cyplasin is not a component of *Aplysia* ink and is not responsible for the cytotoxic activity of the *Aplysia* ink. A detailed description of *Aplysia* anatomy and a dissection guide can be found in the internet in Richard Fox, Invertebrate anatomy (1994, <http://www.science.lander.edu/rsfox/>).

15

20

25

30

The overall aim in tumor therapy is the selective eradication of transformed cells without harming healthy cells. Several glycoproteins isolated from sea hares (*Aplysia* species) have attracted attention because of their anti-tumor activity, e.g. aplysianin A from *Aplysia kurodai*, or cyplasins. The underlying mechanism for such activity has however not been elucidated so far. Recombinant intracellular cyplasins seem to be non-toxic, whereas the extracellular cyplasin is cytotoxic (Petzelt et al., Neoplasia, 4:49-59, 2002).

- 2 -

WO 03/057726 discloses a cyplasin which is devoid of a functional secretory signal sequence. Since cyplasin only causes eukaryotic cell death from outside, the cyplasin of WO 03/057726 can thus be functionally expressed in eukaryotic cells without killing these cells. When acting from
5 outside, cyplasin induced cell death is accompanied by fast depolymerization of the actin filaments. Expression of bioactive cyplasin S and L in prokaryotic host cells is not possible.

WO 02/31144 discloses a further cytotoxic factor isolated from the ink of
10 *Aplysia punctata*. Fragments of the amino acid sequence of the factor are disclosed. No data were presented demonstrating that this factor has any oxidase function or has any properties related to an oxidase.

At least two main phenotypes of cell death are described: apoptosis, a
15 genetically fixed physiological form of cell death, is accompanied by shrinkage, membrane blebbing, nuclear fragmentation, and final disintegration into so-called apoptotic bodies. In contrast, necrosis is a pathological process characterized by membrane disruption and cell swelling. Cell death induced by reactive oxygen and nitrogen species
20 (ROS/NOS) might lead to apoptosis and necrosis but also to other forms of cell death, which cannot be clearly assigned to one of these main forms of cell death.

The cytotoxic factors derived from the sea hares so far have several
25 disadvantages which might hamper its application. The biological function and the nature of the cytotoxic activity, which are prerequisites for the development of a lead compound, are not known so far. Aplysianin A contains a dinucleotide binding fold and the so-called "GG motif" which are found in many flavoproteins. The GG motif has also been described in
30 cyplasins (Petzelt et al., supra). Based on this knowledge, the factors can be applied in its entirety only, because the domains relevant for proper function and cellular receptors are unknown. The administration of an

- 3 -

entire non-self protein to an animal or a human might cause severe immunologic complications.

The dinucleotide binding fold and the GG motif are found e.g. within the N-terminal domain of FAD containing enzymes (e.g. reductases, dehydrogenases, hydroxylases, peroxidases, and oxidases). FAD containing enzymes can be classified into five groups GR1, GR2, FR, PCMH, and PO according to the sequences of their FAD binding domains and additional conserved sequence motifs (Dym and Eisenberg, Protein Science, 10:1712-1728, 2001). The consensus sequence of GR1 and GR2 is GxGxxG. The GG motif RhGGRhxxT/S is commonly found in oxidases, e.g. L-amino acid oxidases, monoamino oxidases, polyamine oxidases, and putrescine oxidases, wherein x describes any amino acid, and h describes a hydrophobic amino acid.

L-amino acid oxidases catalyse the formation of H_2O_2 , ammonia, and an alpha keto acid from an amino acid in the presence of oxygen and H_2O (Geyer et al, 2001, Eur. J. Biochem. 268, 4044-4053). An L-lysine alpha oxidase (EC 1.4.3.14) for instance can be obtained from the fungus *Trichoderma spec.* (Kusakabe et al., J. Biol. Chem. 10:976-981, 1980) which shows antimetastatic effects (Umanskii et al., Biull Eksp Biol Med. 109:458-9, 1990, Khaduev et al., Biull Eksp Biol Med. 112:419-22, 1991). The *Trichoderma* L-lysine oxidase is a dimer with a molecular weight of 112-119 kDa. A further L-lysine oxidase obtained from the fish Chub mackerel is a dimer and has a molecular weight of 135 kDa (Jung et al., J. Immunol. 165:1491-1497, 2000) and induces apoptosis. Apoxin is an L-leucin oxidase from the rattlesnake (*Crotalus atrox*) venom which induces apoptosis in tumor cells and vascular endothelial cells in vitro (Torii et al., J. Biol. Chem. 272:9539-9542, 1997). A cytotoxic L-lysine alpha oxidase is described in the art which penetrates into Jurkat cells and there activates oxidative deamination of L-lysine and correspondingly the peroxide formation. Conjugates of the enzyme with monoclonal antibodies

- 4 -

against the CD5 receptor cannot penetrate into the cells and are assumed to produce toxic H_2O_2 outside the cells. The conjugates have a reduced cytotoxic effect, although the effect of conjugation upon enzymatic activity is negligible (Zhukova et al., Vopr Med Khim 2001, 47:588-592). Another

5 L-lysine oxidase obtained from the snail *Achatina fulica* and producing H_2O_2 is found to have an antimicrobial effect. This oxidase might be useful as an agent against pathogenic bacteria (Ehare et al., 2002, FEBS Letters, 531:509-512).

10 Most known alpha amino acid oxidases which produce H_2O_2 possess a broad substrate specificity. The L-lysine alpha oxidase from *Trichoderma viride* (EC 1.4.3.14, Kusakabe et al., supra) is specific for lysine, but also oxidizes L-ornithine, L-phenylalanine, L-tyrosine, L-arginine, and L-histidine to a lesser extent. The L-lysine oxidase of Chub mackerel (EMBL,

15 AJ400781; Jung et al., supra) is specific for lysine and in addition transforms arginine, histidin, leucine, methionine, phenylalanine, and ornithine (specificity 40 fold reduced). Even if these enzymes could be cytotoxic due to their ability to produce H_2O_2 , a therapeutic use is hampered because substrates of these enzymes are available in the body

20 fluid in amounts sufficient to release H_2O_2 everywhere in the body. Under these conditions, possible negative side effects of H_2O_2 are difficult to eliminate.

In addition to H_2O_2 producing enzymes, cells possess a detoxification

25 system which eliminates reactive oxygen species (ROS), in particular H_2O_2 . An important class of detoxifying peroxidases are peroxiredoxins. Peroxiredoxins comprise a class of highly conserved oxidases. In mammals, six different isoforms are known which catalyze the reduction of peroxides by using reducing equivalents that are provided by thioredoxin or

30 glutathione. During catalysis, peroxiredoxin I (Prx I) is inactivated by oxidation of the active site cysteine to cysteine sulfinic acid, a modification which is reversible upon removal of H_2O_2 . Previously, overexpression of

- 5 -

both Prx I and Prx II has been shown to render cells resistant to H_2O_2 induced apoptosis.

5 The problem underlying the present invention is the provision of a means for selective generation of H_2O_2 in target tissues, e.g. in tumor tissues with less toxic side effects upon normal cells. The solution is a cytotoxic polypeptide which can be isolated from the ink of the sea hare *Aplysia punctata* and which is a specific L-lysine and/or L-arginine oxidase producing H_2O_2 or a fragment or derivative of said polypeptide. The activity
10 of the enzyme can be modulated by administration of substrate. The enzyme provides a lead structure, and it can be used for target identification.

15 A first aspect of the present invention is a purified polypeptide which exhibits cytotoxic activity on tumor cells and which comprises the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2, 4, or 6, or a cytotoxic fragment thereof. These sequences are derived from a cytotoxic 60 kDa protein purified from crude ink of *Aplysia punctata* via anion exchange chromatography and gel filtration (see examples 1 and 4). Thus, the
20 polypeptide or the fragment is termed APIT (*Aplysia punctata* ink toxin). The purity of the fractions can be determined by SDS-PAGE and silver staining.

25 The cytotoxic activity of APIT or the diluted crude ink can be measured by the reduction of the metabolic activity of eukaryotic cells. A person skilled in the art knows suitable methods and cell lines. For example, the metabolic activity of Jurkat T cells can be measured by the addition of WST-1, which is a tetrazolium salt converted by cellular enzymes of viable cells, e.g. by the mitochondrial dehydrogenase, to a dark red formazan.
30 Therefore, the amount of formazan correlates with cell vitality. Formazan can be determined photometrically at 450 nm. Further, dead eukaryotic cells killed by APIT or the diluted crude ink can be counted by adding

- 6 -

propidium iodide (PI) at 1 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ in PBS and subsequent flow cytometer analysis. PI is a DNA binding dye which is taken up by dead cells with permeable membranes.

5 The cytotoxic activity of APIT is reduced by at least 70% after 10 min incubation at 60°C. At 70°C, the activity is almost absent, whereas 0°C to 50°C have no effect upon the activity. APIT shows a loss of activity with decrease of pH, with complete inactivation after 10 min pre-incubation at pH 3. After 30 min treatment with 6 M urea, the activity
10 of APIT is almost unaffected. At 8M urea, the activity is reduced by about 50% (example 3).

Tumor cells treated with APIT displays a morphology which is neither typical for apoptosis nor for necrosis but rather is typical for oxidative
15 damage induced cell death. Shrunken nuclei and lack of cell swelling are apoptotic, and early membrane permeabilization is a necrotic characteristic (example 2). The phenotype induced by APIT could be reproduced in Jurkat cells by treatment of the cells with concentrations of $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2 > 200 \mu\text{M}$, indicating that H_2O_2 is the active compound in APIT cytotoxic effect.
20 H_2O_2 concentrations $< 100 \mu\text{M}$ induced apoptosis in Jurkat cells. In contrast to the mode of action of cyplasins, a depolymerization of the active filaments cannot be observed in APIT induced cell death, indicating that the mechanism of APIT action is distinct from that of cyplasins (Example 12).

25 By depriving possible substrates which can be converted into H_2O_2 from the culture medium of the tumor cells, it can be demonstrated that no further toxic effect of APIT upon tumor cells is present. Deprivation of L-lysine and L-arginine from the medium prevents cell death completely.
30 This phenomenon can be observed within a period of 6 to 8 hours during cultivation of tumor cells. In a detailed analysis of the enzymatic activity of APIT, media containing single amino acids (20 L-amino acids, D-lysine)

- 7 -

confirmed that L-lysine and/or L-arginine is converted into H_2O_2 and the respective alpha keto acid to the same extent, whereas no conversion could be measured with any other of the remaining 18 L-amino acids and D-lysine (example 7). The production of H_2O_2 is independent of the presence of cells, however, the presence of cells reduces the amount of free H_2O_2 , which might be due to detoxification of the medium by the cells. Catalase (a H_2O_2 hydrolyzing enzyme) prevents tumor cell death induced by purified APIT and by crude ink as well, confirming the conclusion that H_2O_2 is responsible for the ink mediated killing of tumor cells (example 6).

Anti-tumor activity also appears after long-term in vitro treatment (> 18 hours) of tumor cells by the cytotoxic factor isolated from the ink of *Aplysia punctata* in combination with an H_2O_2 consuming factor, like catalase. In comparison to tumor treatment with the cytotoxic factor from *Aplysia punctata* alone, this alternative tumor treatment takes a much longer time to become effective. The interplay of both enzyme activities continuously reduces L-lysine and L-arginine in the medium which are essential for the living of tumor cells. The tumor cells die as a result.

In summary, the data demonstrate that the polypeptide of SEQ ID NO: 2, 4, or 6 (APIT) is an oxidase which is capable to produce H_2O_2 . Particularly, the polypeptide is an alpha amino acid oxidase. More particularly, the polypeptide specifically converts L-lysine and/or L-arginine in the presence of O_2 and H_2O into an alpha keto acid, ammonia, and H_2O_2 . Thus, the polypeptide is preferably an L-lysine and/or L-arginine oxidase.

A characteristic feature of the active fractions containing APIT purified from crude ink were two absorption maxima at 390 nm and 470 nm, a hallmark of flavoproteins. A flavine nucleoside, particularly FAD is required as a co-factor for the anti-tumor and oxidase activity of APIT as removal of FAD inactivated APIT (example 5).

- 8 -

Analysis of the sequences SEQ ID NO: 2, 4, and 6 revealed that APIT comprises a sequence similar to known dinucleotide binding folds which are characteristic for flavoproteins (Fig. 4c). The GG-motif (consensus sequence RhGGRhxT/S) is found adjacent to the dinucleotide binding fold.

5 A further aspect of the present invention is a polypeptide comprising a fragment of the polypeptides of the sequences of SEQ ID NO: 2, 4, or 6 which can be used as a lead structure for drug development. APIT can be digested by a protease without loss of activity. Digestion leaves the
10 substrate specificity unaltered. Thus, the fragment exhibiting cytotoxic activity is an L-lysine and/or L-arginine oxidase. Preferably, proteinase K is used which is a relative unspecific protease resulting in small fragments. Other proteases which can be selected among specific or unspecific proteases known by a person skilled in the art can be used instead of
15 proteinase K. The cytotoxic proteinase resistant domain of APIT is of particular importance for the development of a non-immunogenic, fully active small compound.

Further preferred fragments comprise partial amino acid sequences of APIT
20 which are obtained by peptide mass fingerprinting, ESI/MS, and Edman degradation:

DG(I/V)CRNRRQ (SEQ ID NO: 46),

DSGLDIAVFEYS DR (SEQ ID NO: 47),

VFEYS DR (SEQ ID NO: 48),

25 LFX YQLPNT PDVNLEI (SEQ ID NO: 49) (X = T in SEQ ID NO: 2, 4 and 6),

VISELGLTPK (SEQ ID NO: 50),

GDVPYDLSPEEK (SEQ ID NO: 39),

VILAXPVYALN (SEQ ID NO: 51) (X = M in SEQ ID NO: 2, 4 and 6),

ATQAYAAVRPIPA SK (SEQ ID NO: 37),

30 VFMTFDQP (SEQ ID NO: 52),

SDALFFQMYD (SEQ ID NO: 53) (FFQ is FSQ in SEQ ID NO: 2, 4 and 6),

SEASGDYILIASYADGLK (SEQ ID NO: 54),

- 9 -

NQGEDIPGSDPQYNQVTEPLK (SEQ ID NO: 55) (PQY is PGY in SEQ ID NO: 2, 4 and 6)

While not wishing to be bound by theory, the FAD group which is tightly bound to the amino acid chain, e.g. by a covalent bond, might cover possible protease cleavage sites. Thus, protease treatment results in a fragment comprising the active centre of the enzyme, including the prosthetic group FAD. This conclusion is confirmed by the finding that native APIT cannot be cleaved by trypsin, but trypsin can digest denaturated APIT.

Thus, an especially preferred fragment of APIT which is an oxidase exhibiting cytotoxic activity is a sequence comprising the dinucleotide binding fold and the GG motif corresponding to amino acid residues No. 39 to 77 in SEQ ID NO: 2. This sequence is identical to the sequence of amino acid residues No. 38 to 76 in SEQ ID NO: 4 and No. 21 to 59 in SEQ ID NO: 6. More preferably, the fragment has an L-lysine and/or an L-arginine oxidase activity.

Further, the fragment can comprise a stretch of additional amino acid residues which may be selected from SEQ ID NO: 2 or 4 from the sequences adjacent to the residues No. 39 to 77 in SEQ ID NO: 2 or No. 38 to 76 in SEQ ID NO: 4. Preferably, 1-20 additional amino acid can be present at the N-terminus and/or the C-terminus. More preferably, 1-10 additional amino acid can be present at the N-terminus and/or the C-terminus. Most preferably, 1-5 additional amino acid can be present.

A further aspect are polypeptides which are homologous to the polypeptides of SEQ ID NO: 2, 4, or 6, or to fragments thereof, which have an identity of at least 70%, preferably at least 80%, more preferably at least 90%, or most preferably at least 95%. SEQ ID NO: 2, 4, or 6 describe natural variations of APIT by replacements of single amino acids

- 10 -

not affecting its function. In further 11 clones, four mutations were found within the sequence comprising the dinucleotide binding fold and the GG motif (Pos. 39 to 77 in SEQ ID NO: 2, see example 4). Taking into account that a fragment obtained by proteolytic digestion is still active as a L-lysine and/or L-arginine oxidase, it can be expected that further modifications of the sequence, e.g. by amino acid substitutions, deletions and/or insertions will not substantially affect the function of APIT. A modified sequence exhibits an identity of preferably at least 70%, more preferably at least 80% and most preferably at least 90% to a reference sequence, e.g. SEQ ID NO: 2. Preferably, the sequence of Pos. 39 to 77 in SEQ ID NO: 2 has a higher degree of identity to the reference sequence than the total amino acid sequence, e.g. preferably at least 33 of 39 amino acid residues (at least about 85%), more preferably 35 of 39 residues (at least about 90%), and most preferably 37 of 39 residues (at least about 95%).

A still further aspect is a polypeptide of the present invention as described above which is a recombinant polypeptide. The recombinant polypeptide is characterized as being manufactured in a heterologous, i.e. non-*Aplysia* host cell, e.g. in a bacterial cell such as *E. coli* or *Bacillus*, in a yeast cell such as *saccharomyces cerevisiae*, in an insect cell or in a mammalian cell. The recombinant polypeptide has preferably an oxidase, or, more preferably, an L-lysine and/or an L-arginine oxidase activity. Expression of the polypeptide can be done by standard expression systems known by a person skilled in the art. For proper enzymatic function, the prosthetic group FAD may have to be introduced into the polypeptide.

The protein of the invention or a fragment thereof may be in the form of a fusion protein, i.e. fused to heterologous peptide or polypeptide sequences. Preferably fusion proteins are genetic fusions, wherein the nucleic acid sequence encoding a protein or a protein fragment as described above is fused to a nucleic acid sequence encoding a heterologous peptide or polypeptide sequence. The heterologous peptide or polypeptide sequence

may be selected from signal sequences, which provide desired processing and/or transport in a host cell. The signal sequence is preferably located at the N- and/or C-terminus of the APIT sequence. Further examples of heterologous sequences are domains which assist expression in host cells and/or purification from cellular extracts or culture media. Still further examples of heterologous sequences are targeting sequences which may direct the APIT polypeptide to a desired target site, e.g. in an organism. Suitable targeting sequences may be e.g. single chain antibodies, which may be directed against tumor specific antigens or proteinaceous ligand sequences, which may be directed against tumor specific receptors.

A further aspect of the present invention is a nucleic acid coding for the polypeptide as described above. The total mRNA of the mantle gland, the nidamental gland, the digestive gland, and the opaline gland can be prepared by standard methods. The mRNA can be reverse transcribed using the tagged oligo dT oligonucleotide (Oligo 1, Fig. 4b). The tag is a random sequence not expected to be present within *Aplysia* mRNA to be reverse transcribed. PCR can be performed using the degenerated primer (Oligo 2) derived from the APIT peptide VFEYSDR and the specific primer (Oligo 3) directed against the tag sequence of the oligo dT primer Oligo 1. The amplified sequence can be cloned into a standard vector and can be sequenced by standard techniques. By this strategy, the 3' terminal sequence of the APIT gene can be obtained. The 5' terminal sequence can be obtained by the RACE strategy. The mRNA from selected tissues (see above) is reverse transcribed using an oligonucleotide derived from the known 3' terminal sequence (e.g. Oligo 4, or Oligo 6) and can be treated with a terminal transferase in the presence of CTP, resulting in a 3'-poly-C-sequence (at the minus strand). PCR can be performed using a tagged primer against the poly-C-sequence (Oligo 5) and a specific primer, e.g. Oligo 4, or Oligo 6. The amplified product can be cloned and sequenced by standard techniques. Finally, for obtaining full-length cDNA clones, specific primers, e.g. Oligo 8 and Oligo 9 can be used. By this

- 12 -

strategy, three different clones were obtained and sequenced. The nucleotide sequences are described in SEQ. ID. No.1, 3, and 5 which are identical to 97% (1560 of 1608) of the nucleotides. 42 of 48 mutations are silent mutations which have no effect upon the amino acid sequence.

5

By this strategy, further clones of APIT can be obtained which might have a differing sequence. Since more than ten sequences of APIT are known, specific or degenerated primers may be selected from these sequences, and new clones can be obtained by a single PCR of reverse transcribed mRNA.

10

Thus, the nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide as specified above preferably comprises

- (a) a nucleotide sequence as shown in SEQ ID NO: 1, 3, or 5, or at least the polypeptide coding portion thereof, or the complement thereof, or
- (b) a nucleotide sequence corresponding to the sequence of (a) within the scope of degeneracy of the genetic code, or the complement thereof, or
- (c) a nucleotide sequence hybridizing under stringent condition with the sequence of (a) and/or (b), or
- (d) a nucleotide sequence which is homologous to the sequences of (a) and/or (b).

15

20

The nucleic acid may be a single stranded or double stranded nucleic acid (DNA or RNA). The nucleic acid is obtainable from natural sources e.g. from *Aplysia* by extraction of RNA, construction of cDNA libraries and screening of the library using degenerated oligonucleotides which were deduced from the peptide sequences described above. The nucleic acid is further obtainable by RT-PCR using RNA extracted from *Aplysia* and oligo-dT-primers or degenerated primers. On the other hand, the nucleic acid is obtainable by chemical synthesis.

30

- 13 -

Hybridization under stringent conditions preferably means that after washing for 1 h with 1 x SSC and 0.1% SDS at 55 °C, preferably at 62 °C and more preferably at 68 °C, particularly after washing for 1 h with 0.2 x SSC and 0.1% SDS at 55 °C, preferably at 62 °C and more preferably at 68 °C, a hybridization signal is detected.

The degree of identity of the nucleic acid is at least 70%, preferably at least 80%, more preferably at least 90%, and most preferably at least 95% to a reference sequence, e.g. SEQ ID NO: 1, 3 or 5.

Further, the nucleic acid encoding a cytotoxic polypeptide can comprise a partial sequence of the nucleotide sequence as disclosed in SEQ ID NO: 1, 3, or 5. Preferably, the partial sequence is selected from nucleotide No. 115 to 231 in SEQ ID NO: 1, or nucleotide No. 112 to 228 in SEQ ID NO: 3, or nucleic acid residue No. 61 to 177 in SEQ ID NO: 5, or the partial sequence codes for at least one of the eleven fragments of APIT obtained by peptide mass fingerprinting, ESI/MS, and Edman degradation. Further, the partial sequence can comprise a stretch of additional nucleotides selected from the sequences adjacent to the sequence selected from SEQ ID NO: 1, 3, or 5. Preferably, 1-60 additional nucleotides can be present at the 5' and/or the 3'-terminus. More preferably, 1-30 additional nucleotides can be present at the 5' and/or the 3'-terminus. Most preferably, 1-10 additional nucleotides can be present at the 5' and/or the 3'-terminus.

Furthermore, the nucleic acid may encode a fusion polypeptide as described above.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention the nucleic acid is operatively linked to an expression control sequence, e.g. a sequence which is capable of directing expression in a suitable host cell, e.g. a prokaryotic or eukaryotic host cell. The expression control sequence usually comprises a promoter and optionally operator or enhancer sequences which enable a

- 14 -

transcription of the nucleic acid operatively linked thereto. Furthermore, the expression control sequence may contain a translation signal, e.g. a ribosome binding sequence.

5 The nucleic acid of the present invention may be a recombinant vector which contains in addition usual vector sequences such as an origin of replication, a selection marker gene and/or a cloning site. Examples of suitable vectors such as plasmids, phages or viral vectors are known to the skilled person and are described e.g. in Sambrook et al., Molecular Cloning,
10 A Laboratory Manual (2nd ed. 1998), Cold Spring Harbor, Laboratory Press.

A further aspect of the present invention is a recombinant cell transformed or transfected with a nucleic acid as described above. The recombinant cell
15 may be a prokaryotic cell, e.g. a gram-negative prokaryotic cell such as *E. coli* or an eukaryotic cell, e.g. an insect cell or a vertebrate cell such as a mammalian cell. Techniques for transforming or transfecting host cells with nucleic acids are known to the skilled person and e.g. described in Sambrook et al., supra.

20 Still a further subject matter of the present invention is an antibody directed against the polypeptide as described above. The antibody may inhibit the cytotoxic activity of the polypeptide. The antibody may be a polyclonal or monoclonal antibody or a recombinant antibody, e.g. a
25 chimeric antibody, a humanized antibody or a single chain antibody. Furthermore, the antibody may be an antibody fragment containing the antigen-binding site of the antibody, e.g. a Fab fragment. The antibody may be obtained by immunizing suitable experimental animals with an *Aplysia* polypeptide as described above or a partial fragment thereof or a
30 peptide antigen optionally coupled to a suitable macromolecular carrier according to known protocols, e.g. by techniques which are described in Borrebaeck, Carl A.K. (Ed.), Antibody engineering (1992), or Clark, M.

- 15 -

(Ed.), Protein engineering of antibody molecules for prophylactic and therapeutic applications in man (1993). By techniques for producing hybridoma cell lines according to Köhler and Milstein monoclonal antibodies may be obtained.

5

Methods for introducing a prosthetic group into a polypeptide are known in the art. Preferably, the FAD is introduced by a method comprising surface display of the polypeptide on a prokaryotic host, comprising the steps:

- 10 (a) providing a prokaryotic host cell transformed with a nucleic acid fusion operatively linked with an expression control sequence, said nucleic acid fusion comprising sequences necessary for displaying the protein on the outer membrane, and
- (b) culturing the host cell under condition wherein the nucleic acid
15 fusion is expressed and the expression product comprising the recombinant polypeptide is displayed on the surface of the host cell, and
- (c) contacting the recombinant polypeptide with FAD under conditions wherein FAD combines with the recombinant polypeptide and a
20 functional recombinant polypeptide containing the prosthetic group is formed.

The nucleic acid fusion may be formed using a nucleic acid sequence as described above and further sequences necessary for surface display.

- 25 Details describing the prokaryotic host cells, the sequences necessary for surface display of the polypeptide, culture conditions, and the conditions under which the recombinant polypeptide is contacted with FAD are described in WO 02/070645, which is included by reference herein.

- 30 A further aspect of the present invention relates to diagnostic or therapeutic applications in humans or animals. The polypeptide, and/or a nucleic acid, and/or a recombinant cell, and/or an effector, e.g. an inhibitor

- 16 -

or activator of the polypeptide as described above can be used in such applications. The polypeptide as described above is able to selectively kill tumor cells. For example, T and B leukemia cell lines, a chronic myeloid leukemia cell line (K562), cells from an orphan and aggressive
5 osteosarcoma (Ewings tumor: RDES, A673), a small cell lung cancer cell line (GLC4, GLC4/ADR), cervix cancer (Chang), and acute monocytic leukemia (THP-1) show an $IC_{50} \leq 10$ ng/ml APIT.

Healthy human cells are resistant against APIT-induced cell death. At a
10 concentration of 40ng/ml, APIT induces a cell death below 10% in normal HUVEC cells (Example 13). This indicates that the APIT IC_{50} values of healthy cells are at least one order of magnitude higher than the IC_{50} of tumor cells.

15 Resistance to apoptosis as well as multi drug resistance (MDR) represent severe problems in cancer therapy. It is therefore of particular interest that the polypeptide of the present invention kills apoptosis resistant cell lines as well as MDR cancer cell lines to the same extent as their non resistant counter parts. Over-expression of apoptosis inhibitors of the Bcl-2 family in
20 cancer cell lines does not protect from APIT mediated cell death, confirming that APIT induces cell death in an apoptosis independent way. The MDR cell line GLC4/ADR possess almost the same sensitivity to APIT (IC_{50} 10 ng/ml) as the parental cancer line GLC4 does (IC_{50} 9 ng/ml).

25 Thus, the diagnostic or therapeutic application preferably relates to a method for diagnosis or treatment of hyperproliferative diseases, e.g. cancer. More preferably, the method is a method for diagnosis or treatment of lung cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, colon cancer, cervix cancer, uterus cancer, larynx cancer, stomach cancer, liver cancer, Ewings
30 sarkoma, acute lymphoid leukemia, acute and chronic myeloid leukemia, apoptosis resistant leukemia, and/or MDR lung cancer. Moreover other tumor types can also be treated with the polypeptide, like pancreas cancer,

- 17 -

gastric cancer, kidney cancer, gliomas, melanomas, chronic lymphoid leukemia, and/or lymphoma. Since all cancer cell lines tested (in total 24) were effectively killed by APIT, the polypeptide can be used for the treatment of solid tumors and leukemias in general including apoptosis resistant and multi drug resistant cancer forms.

A further aspect of the present invention is a pharmaceutical composition comprising the polypeptide of the present invention as described above, in a pharmaceutically effective amount and optionally together with suitable diluents and carriers or kit containing the composition together with other active ingredients, e.g. modulators of the polypeptide or other cytostatic or cytotoxic agents. The composition can be administered locally or systemically by any suitable means, e.g. orally, nasally or by injection (i.v., i.p., s.c., or i.m.) to a subject in need thereof. The components of a kit, which consists of at least two different compositions may be administered together or separately, e.g. at different times and/or by different routes.

In another embodiment, the pharmaceutical composition or the kit comprises a nucleic acid encoding for the polypeptide of the present invention as described above. Further, the pharmaceutical composition or kit may comprise both the polypeptide and the nucleic acid of the present invention.

From many studies it is known that tumor cells have an increased rate of metabolism compared to normal cells. A result of this high metabolic rate is a high concentration of reactive oxygen species (ROS, comprising H_2O_2) which originate from oxidative phosphorylation reactions by the electron transport chain of the mitochondria. As a consequence ROS detoxification reactions are increased in tumor cells, and interference with detoxification has a selective toxic effect on the tumor cells but not on normal cells. Likewise, increasing the concentration of H_2O_2 by administering the polypeptide of the invention in a predetermined amount may overcome the

- 18 -

detoxification reactions and kill the tumor cells. The level of extra H_2O_2 produced by exogenous APIT does not affect normal cells because of their higher tolerance for additional H_2O_2 . An administration of the polypeptide in a varying amount, e.g. a gradually changing, e.g. increasing amount leads to the production of a defined amount of H_2O_2 could thus be used for a selective killing of cancer cells.

The pharmaceutical composition or kit as described above can comprise a further component which is a substance capable of modulating the cytotoxic activity of the polypeptide, in a pharmaceutically effective amount and optionally together with suitable diluents, and carriers. In FCS (100%) at 37°C and 5% CO_2 which reflect *in vivo* conditions, or in a medium containing 10% FCS (typical *in vitro* conditions) devoid of L-lysine and L-arginine, the activity of APIT (20 ng/ml) can be dose-dependently increased by the addition of L-lysine in a final concentration of 2 – 50 $\mu g/ml$. Thus, the high specificity of APIT for L-lysine (and L-arginine) allows for modulating the enzymatic activity of APIT and thus its cytotoxic activity by providing an additional substrate *in vivo* or *in vitro*. The substance capable of modulating the cytotoxic activity of the polypeptide can be L-lysine, L-arginine, a derivative or metabolic precursor of L-lysine, or L-arginine, or a mixture thereof. A derivative is a compound which is an APIT substrate. A metabolic precursor is a compound, which can be metabolized to a compound, which is an APIT substrate. Further, the modulator may be selected from flavine nucleosides, particularly FAD, since the presence of a flavine nucleoside prosthetic group leads to a great increase in APIT activity.

The pharmaceutical composition may comprise the polypeptide and at least one modulating substance as a mixture. Preferably, the modulating substances are provided in a kit consisting of separate preparations. More preferable, the polypeptide is provided for administration before the modulating substances.

- 19 -

During the passage through body fluids before reaching the tumor tissue, the cytotoxic activity of the polypeptide would be undesired, due to the toxic properties of H_2O_2 . Thus, the composition may further comprise an inhibitor of the polypeptide. The inhibitor could have a short half-life time in the body fluid. A preferred inhibitor of the polypeptide is an antibody against the polypeptide (see above).

Modulating the activity of the polypeptide of the present invention can also be accomplished by modulating the product level, i.e. the H_2O_2 level. The degradation of at least one of the products, namely H_2O_2 , results further on in consumption of the substrates L-lysine and L-arginine by the polypeptide of the present invention. Thus, these amino acids may be deprived. Since L-lysine and L-arginine are essential for living and growing of tumor cells, deprivation of these amino acids by a combination of the polypeptide of the present invention and an H_2O_2 scavenger may lead to the death of tumor cells. Thus, in another embodiment, the pharmaceutical composition may comprise the polypeptide of the present invention and an H_2O_2 scavenger. A preferred H_2O_2 scavenger is catalase. Preferably, a kit is provided consisting of separate preparations of the polypeptide of the present invention and catalase.

Further the polypeptide can be coupled with a substance and/or a particle which targets the polypeptide to the tumor tissue.

Further components of the pharmaceutical composition can be a nucleic acid coding for the polypeptide as described above, and/or a recombinant vector or cell containing the nucleic acid.

A further aspect of the present invention is a substance modified by interaction with APIT (termed target substance of APIT). A direct interaction is a contact of APIT with this substance. In an indirect interaction, the effect upon the substance includes at least one mediator

- 20 -

substance, e.g a substance formed by APIT, or a receptor interacting with APIT and the components of the related transduction cascade.

As described above, a mediator of APIT acting on cellular polypeptides is H_2O_2 . Thus, preferred target substances of APIT comprise cellular polypeptides, which can be modified by H_2O_2 . A major modification identified in 2-DE SDS gel patterns of cells treated with APIT was a shift of peroxiredoxin I (Prx I, Swiss-Prot No. Q06830, Genbank identifier No. 548453, SEQ ID NO: 8), which was also detected in cells treated with H_2O_2 . Prx I belongs to a class of peroxidases which are involved in the detoxification of ROS. Although the nature of the modification of Prx is not known, Prx I can be used as a marker for APIT anti-tumor activity.

Thus, particularly preferred substances which can be used as target substances of the polypeptide as described above are peroxidases, especially preferably peroxiredoxin I or a polypeptide having substantially the same biological activity as peroxiredoxin I. Peroxiredoxin I may comprise

- (a) the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 8, or/and
- (b) an amino acid sequence which is homologous to the sequence of (a) with at least 70%, preferably 80%, particularly preferably 90%, especially preferably 95%, or/and
- (c) a fragment of the amino acid sequence of (a) or (b).

Further, peroxiredoxin I may comprise an amino acid sequence or a fragment thereof as disclosed in at least one of the Genbank entries selected from gi:4505591 (NP_002565.1), gi:13626803 (XP_001393.2), gi:32455264 (NP_859047.1), gi: 32455266 (NP_859048.1), gi: 423025 (A46711), gi: 287641 (CAA48137.1), gi: 13937907 (AAH07063.1), gi: 18204954 (AHH21683.1) or gi:440306 (AAA50464.1).

- 21 -

WO 02/31144 discloses proteins modified by H_2O_2 which are targets of APIT: thioredoxin peroxidase 2 (Swiss Prot No. Q06830, Genbank identifier 548453), 60S ribosomal protein P0 (12654583), Hsp-60 (N-term) (14603309), stathmin (5031851), Rho GDI 2 (P52566, 1707893), 60S
5 ribosomal protein P0(4506667), RNA binding regulatory subunit (O14805,12720028), hnRNP C1/C2 (4758544), hnRNP C1/C2 (4758544), proteasome subunit beta type 1 (P20618, 130853), pre-mRNA cleavage factor Im (5901926), proteasome subunit alpha type 7 (O14818, 12643540), U2 small nuclear ribonucleo-protein A' (P09661, 134094),
10 GAP SH3 binding protein (5031703), DNA replication licensing factor MCM4 (P33991, 1705520), thioredoxin peroxidase 1 (P32119, 2507169), 40S ribosomal protein S21 (P35265, 464710), 40S ribosomal protein S12 (P25398, 133742), phosphoglycerate mutase 1 (P18669, 130348), HCC-1 protein (13940310), HnRNP A2/B1 (4504447/14043072), IMP dehydro-
15 genase 2 (P12268, 124419), hnRNP A/B (14724990).

Further targets of APIT identified by 2 DE gel electrophoresis, in-gel tryptic digestion, peptide mass fingerprinting by MALDI-MS, and identification of the proteins are summarized in Table 3.

20

Still a further target of APIT is a nucleic acid. The target nucleic acid can be a DNA or an RNA, which is a mRNA. The transcription of the mRNA is up- or downregulated in the presence of APIT and/or H_2O_2 . Preferably, the transcription is changed by a factor of at least 2, and more preferably, by
25 a factor of at least 4.

By a microarray of specific 60mer oligonucleotides representing about 8500 human genes, about 70 mRNAs were identified which are targets of APIT. The information about the mRNAs are summarized in Table 4. Each
30 mRNA is referenced by a "unigene cluster" which represents a number of nucleotide sequences belonging to the same gene or to closely related genes. Details of the nomenclature and the nucleotide sequences of the

- 22 -

unigene clusters are public available under <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/> (Homepage of the National Center for Biotechnology Information).

For most of the unigene clusters of Table 4, the gene and/or the protein is known. It is a general principle that modulation of the transcription of a messenger RNA influences the amount of protein expressed. Thus, the proteins coded by the sequences of the unigene clusters of Table 4 are also targets of APIT, because APIT may influence their expression. The sequences of the proteins and of the nucleic acids coding for these proteins are referenced by the genbank identifier, accession number and/or version number (see Table 4). The sequences are public available under <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>.

Additional targets of APIT (nucleic acids, proteins) obtained by microarray analysis as described above are summarized in Table 5.

A preferred substance which can be used as a target substance for the polypeptide as described above is a nucleic acid coding for a peroxidase, particularly preferably peroxiredoxin I or a polypeptide having substantially the same biological activity as peroxiredoxin I. The nucleic acid coding for peroxiredoxin I may comprise

- (a) the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 7, or/and
- (b) a nucleotide sequence which corresponds to the sequence of (a) within the scope of the degeneracy of the genetic code, or/and
- (c) a nucleotide sequence hybridizing to the sequence of (a) or/and (b) under stringent conditions, or/and
- (d) a fragment of the nucleotide sequence of (a), (b) or (c).

SEQ ID NO: 7 is disclosed in Genbank entry gi:14721336 (XM001393).

- 23 -

Preferably, the nucleic acid encoding peroxiredoxin I may comprise a nucleotide sequence which is homologous to SEQ ID NO: 7 with at least 70%, particularly preferably at least 80%, especially preferably at least 90%.

5

In further preferred embodiments, the nucleic acid encoding peroxiredoxin I may comprise a nucleotide sequence or a fragment thereof as disclosed in at least one of the Genbank entries selected from gi: 13937906 (BC007063.1, PRDX1 transcript 3), gi: 18204953 (BC021683.1, PRDX1 transcript variant 3), gi: 32455265 (NM_181697.1, PRDX1 transcript variant 3), gi: 34528302 (AK131049.1, clone highly similar to PRDX1), gi: 287640 (X679851.1, PAG), gi: 32455263 (NM_181696.1, PRDX1 transcript variant 2), gi: 32455267 (NM_002574.2, PRDX1 transcript variant 2) or gi:440305, (L19184, NKEF A).

15.

The target substance of the present invention (see Table 3, 4 and 5), which is identified by one of the methods as described above, may be used for the development of new pharmaceutical agents, e.g. by known high-throughput screening procedures which may be cellular screening procedures or molecular based screening procedures. These pharmaceutical agents may act upon cellular receptors and/or components of the signal transduction pathways activated or inhibited by APIT.

Degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease are characterised by excessive ROS production of the affected tissue. Drugs which either activate H_2O_2 detoxification or inhibit H_2O_2 production may be used for therapy of degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease. Fast growing tumor cells produce more ROS and thus require an efficient H_2O_2 detoxification system. Drugs which either activate H_2O_2 production or which interfere with H_2O_2 detoxification may be used for therapy of proliferative diseases like tumors. Since e.g. thioredoxin peroxidases 1 and 2 have been shown to be overexpressed in cells at risk

- 24 -

for diseases related to ROS toxicity including degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, and have been shown to be overexpressed in tumor cells (Butterfield et al., 1999, *Antioxidants & Redox Signalling*, 1, 385-402), the targets of Table 3 and 4 might be
5 important targets for the development of drugs for treatment of degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease and of proliferative diseases like tumors.

NK-cells have been shown to protect against malignant cells in chronic
10 myelogenous leukemia (CML), but their number and inducibility is reduced during the progression of the disease. This reduction and dysfunction is due to the production of H_2O_2 by CML-cells (Mellqvist, Blood 2000, 96, 1961-1968). NK-cells encountering H_2O_2 are inhibited in their lytic activity, are made resistant to IL-2 activation and undergo apoptosis/necrosis. Any
15 therapy providing CML-patients with ROS-hyposensitive NK-cells therefore would be of great benefit. The targets described above could be used to modulate the H_2O_2 sensitivity of NK-cells or to inhibit the H_2O_2 production of malignant cells, e.g. CML-cells.

20 Arteriosclerosis with its progression to heart disease, stroke and peripheral vascular disease continues to be the leading cause of death in all western civilisations. Enhanced ROS-production (via endothelial NADPH-oxidase) is required and sufficient to generate the pathologic phenotype (Meyer, FEBS Letters 2000, 472, 1-4). Therefore, targets mediating the effect of H_2O_2
25 are useful to develop new drugs for treatment of arteriosclerosis and the associated diseases like heart disease, stroke and other vascular diseases. These targets are suitable to detoxify H_2O_2 and/or to block the H_2O_2 induced signalling pathways.

30 Target compounds, e.g. peptides, polypeptides or low-molecular weight organic compounds, which are capable of modulating the effect of H_2O_2

- 25 -

may be identified in a screening system comprising the use of the APIT polypeptide as described above. Particularly, a modulation of the APIT activity, i.e. L-amino oxidase activity, may be determined.

5 Thus the present invention further relates to a pharmaceutical composition comprising as an active agent at least one of the target substances as described above.

10 Still a further aspect of the present invention is an inhibitor of a target as described above, in particular an inhibitor of the detoxification system of the cell which eliminates reactive oxygen species, e.g. H_2O_2 . Surprisingly, it was found that the inhibition of detoxifying enzymes sensitized tumor cells to the cytotoxic activity of the polypeptide of the present invention as described above. Example 11 demonstrates that knock-down of
15 peroxiredoxin I sensitized tumor cells for APIT-induced cell death.

Preferably, the inhibitor is an inhibitor of peroxidase, particularly of peroxiredoxin I. The inhibitor may be an antibody or a nucleic acid molecule, i.e. useful for antisense inhibition or as an siRNA molecule. It is
20 particularly preferred that the inhibitor is an inhibitor of peroxiredoxin I activity which is an RNA molecule, particularly a double-stranded RNA molecule comprising a nucleic acid sequence of at least 15 nucleotides complementary to a peroxiredoxin I transcript. It is especially preferred that the peroxiredoxin I transcript is derived from SEQ ID NO:7.

25

The one or two strands of the RNA molecule as described above may, independently, have a length of 19 to 25 nucleotides, preferably 19 to 23 nucleotides. Especially preferred is a length of the one or two strands of 19, 20, 21, 22 or 23 nucleotides. The RNA molecule as described above
30 may comprise at least one modified nucleotide. Preferably, modified nucleotides are selected from the group consisting of oxetane[1-(1',3'-O- α nhydro- β -D-psicofuranosyl)-nucleotides, locked nucleic acid (LNA)

- 26 -

nucleotides, hexitol nucleotides, altritol nucleotides, cyclohexane nucleotides, neutral phosphate analogs.

5 The double-stranded RNA molecule as described above may have one or two 3' overhangs with, independently, a length of 1 to 5 nucleotides, preferably 1 to 3 nucleotides, particularly preferably 2 nucleotides. The one or two overhangs may consist of ribonucleotides, deoxyribonucleotides, modified nucleotides as described above or combinations thereof.

10 The double-stranded RNA molecule as described above may comprise a sequence selected from the group of sequences consisting of SEQ ID NO: 9, SEQ ID NO: 10, SEQ ID NO: 11; SEQ ID NO: 12; SEQ ID NO: 13; SEQ ID NO: 14; SEQ ID NO: 15; SEQ ID NO: 16; SEQ ID NO: 17; SEQ ID NO: 18; SEQ ID NO: 19; SEQ ID NO: 20; SEQ ID NO: 21; SEQ ID NO: 22; SEQ ID NO: 23; SEQ ID NO: 24; SEQ ID NO: 25; SEQ ID NO: 26; SEQ ID NO: 27; SEQ ID NO: 28; SEQ ID NO: 29.

Yet another aspect of the present invention is a pharmaceutical composition or kit comprising an inhibitor as described above, preferably an RNA molecule, particularly preferred a double-stranded RNA molecule, or a nucleic acid encoding such an RNA molecule. The pharmaceutical composition or kit may comprise the inhibitor as sole active agent in order to increase the amount of reactive oxygen species present in the cell due to endogenous production. More importantly, the pharmaceutical composition or kit may comprise the inhibitor and a substance capable of producing reactive oxygen species. In a preferred embodiment, the pharmaceutical composition or kit comprises as an active agent a combination of APIT and at least one inhibitor of a target substance as described in Table 3 or/and Table 4 or/and Table 5, more preferably at least one inhibitor of peroxiredoxin I. In another preferred embodiment, the pharmaceutical composition or kit comprises at least one inhibitor of a target substance as described in Table 3 or/and Table 4 or/and Table 5,

- 27 -

more preferably at least one inhibitor of peroxiredoxin I, and the polypeptide of the present invention having cytotoxic activity as described above. In yet another preferred embodiment, the pharmaceutical composition or kit comprises at least one inhibitor of a target substance as described in Table 3 or/and Table 4 or/and Table 5, more preferably at least one inhibitor of peroxiredoxin I, and a cytotoxic polypeptide producing reactive oxygen species or/and a nucleic acid encoding such a cytotoxic polypeptide, wherein the cytotoxic polypeptide is selected from cytotoxic polypeptides obtainable from sea hares, e.g. Cyplasin C, Cyplasin L, Aplysianin A, Aplysianin P, Aplysianin E, Dolabellin A, Dolabellin C, Dolabellin P, Julianin G, Julianin S, or is selected from L-Lysine oxidases like EC 1.4.3.14 from *Trichoderma*, AIP from Chub mackerel (AJ400871), Apoxin from *Crotalus* (AAD45200.1), or from other L-amino acid oxidases like EC 1.4.3.2 or from other enzymes which produce H_2O_2 . More preferably, the pharmaceutical composition or kit comprises

(I) a polypeptide obtainable from *Aplysia* comprising an amino acid sequence selected from:

- (a) D-G-E-D-A-A-V (SEQ ID NO:32) and/or
- (b) (D/Q)-G-(I/V)-C-R-N-(Q/R)-R-(Q/P) (SEQ ID NO:33),
- (c) F-A-D-S (SEQ ID NO:34),
- (d) G-P-D-G-(I/L)-V-A-D (SEQ ID NO:35),
- (e) P-G-E-V-S-(K/Q)-(I/L) (SEQ ID NO: 36),
- (f) A-T-Q-A-Y-A-A-V-R-P-I-P-A-S-K (SEQ ID NO:37),
- (g) D-S-G-L-D-I-A-V-E-Y-S-D-R (SEQ ID NO:38),
- (h) G-D-V-P-Y-D-L-S-P-E-E-K (SEQ ID NO: 39) or/and
- (i) SEQ ID NO: 41, 43, 44, 45.

or a fragment thereof wherein the polypeptide or the fragment has cytotoxic activity, or/and a nucleic acid encoding the cytotoxic polypeptide obtainable from *Aplysia* comprising

- 28 -

- (i) a nucleotide sequence as shown in SEQ ID NO:40 or 42 or at least the polypeptide coding portion thereof or the complement thereof,
- (ii) a nucleotide sequence corresponding to the sequence of (a) within the scope of degeneracy of the genetic code, or the complement thereof, or/and
- (iii) a nucleotide sequence hybridizing under stringent conditions with the sequence of (a) or/and (b), and

(II) an inhibitor of a target substance as described in Table 3 or/and Table 4 or/and Table 5.

The inhibitor of the present invention may be coupled to carriers, (e.g. lipids, peptides, biodegradable polymers, dendrimers, vitamins, carbohydrate receptors) for *in vivo* targeting to predetermined tissues or/and cell types.

Delivery of the inhibitors of the present invention may be improved by linking the inhibitors with lipids, liposomes, PEG, nanoparticles or/and polymers, for example.

Yet another aspect of the present invention is a gene therapy delivery system suitable for delivery of a nucleic acid encoding an inhibitor which is an RNA molecule, preferably a double-stranded RNA molecule as described above, capable of inhibiting peroxidase, particularly peroxiredoxin I activity. Suitable delivery systems for gene therapy are commonly known in the art, for instance a recombinant adenoviral delivery system, a recombinant adenoviral-derived system or a recombinant lentiviral system. Further, the nucleic acid may be delivered by virus-like particles from *Papillomaviridae* and *Polyomaviridae*. Further, bacteria may be used as a delivery system,

- 29 -

e.g. attenuated gram negative bacteria, particularly attenuated salmonella strains. The nucleic acid encoding the inhibitor is operatively linked with expression control sequences which are adapted to the host and to the delivery system. Such expression control sequences are known to a person skilled in the art. Expression of the two strands of the RNA molecule may be performed together in a self-complementary configuration which allows formation of a small hairpin RNA (shRNA) in which the two strands of the double-stranded molecule are interconnected by an additional loop, or may be performed as two separate strands which hybridize later on in the host.

Yet another aspect is a pharmaceutical composition or kit comprising a delivery system suitable for delivery of a nucleic acid encoding an inhibitor which is an RNA molecule, particularly a double-stranded RNA molecule preferably comprising a nucleic acid of at least 15 nucleotides complementary to a peroxiredoxin I transcript as described above, to predetermined tissues or/and cell types.

In yet another embodiment, the invention concerns a method for diagnosis or treatment of cancer, wherein a pharmaceutical composition as described above is administered to a subject in need thereof.

SEQ ID NO: 1, 3 and 5 show the APIT nucleotide sequences as shown in Fig. 4c. SEQ ID NO: 2, 4 and 6 show the amino acid sequences derived from SEQ ID NO: 1, 3 and 5, respectively. SEQ ID NO: 7 and 8 show the nucleotide sequence and the amino acid sequence of Prx I. SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 29 show the nucleotide sequences of double-stranded siRNA molecules capable of inhibiting Prx I activity. SEQ ID NOs: 30 and 31 show sequences of double stranded siRNA molecules obtained from the Lamin AC and the luciferase sequence, respectively. SEQ ID NOs: 32 to 39 show the amino acid sequences of fragments of cytotoxic *Aplysia* polypeptides. SEQ ID NO: 40 and 42 show partial sequences of nucleic acids encoding cytotoxic polypeptides of *Aplysia punctata*. SEQ ID NOs: 41, 43, 44 and

- 30 -

45 show the derived amino acid sequences of SEQ ID NOs: 40 and 42. SEQ ID NOs: 46 to 55 show the amino acid sequences of fragments of cytotoxic *Aplysia* polypeptides.

- 5 The invention is explained in more detail by the following figures, tables and examples.

Figure 1

10 A, Anion exchange chromatography. Filtrated and concentrated ink was loaded onto a Source Q15 column. Proteins were eluted by a linear gradient from 0 to 800 mM NaCl, fractions were collected every minute (2 ml/min). Absorption was measured at 280 nm. Horizontal bar indicates active fractions.

15 B, Gelfiltration. Active fractions from the Source Q15 were pooled and concentrated and applied to a Superose 12 HR 10/30 column. Proteins were eluted with 100 mM potassium phosphate buffer (pH 7.2). Fractions were collected every minute (0.5 ml/min). Horizontal bar indicates active
20 fractions.

Figure 2

A, Phenotype of APIT-induced cell death. Jurkat cells were cultured for 7
25 hours in the presence (APIT) or absence (medium) of APIT (30 ng/ml) and phase contrast images were recorded.

B, Lack of apoptotic DNA fragmentation in ink-treated cells. Jurkat cells were incubated in medium (control) or treated with cycloheximide (chx; 10
30 μ g/ml) or ink (ink, 1/500 diluted) for 2, 4 and 6 h. Isolated DNA was visualized on a 1,6% agarose gel by ethidium bromide staining.

- 31 -

C, APIT mediated loss of metabolic activity. APIT (10 ng/ml) and the tetrazolium-salt WST-1 were added simultaneously to Jurkat cells and turnover of WST-1 was measured photometrically. White circles: medium control; black circles: APIT-treated samples; mean absorbance of 8 replicates \pm SD.

D, Cell death induced by ink. Jurkat cells were treated with ink (1/500 diluted) and propidium iodide (PI) uptake was measured as indicator for dead cells.

Figure 3

A, Heat sensitivity of ink. Dialysed ink was incubated for 10 min at the indicated temperatures and enzymatic activity was measured as H_2O_2 -production (mean of triplicates \pm SD). Blank: medium control.

B, pH-sensitivity of APIT. APIT (60 ng) was incubated for 10 min at 25°C in 0,1 M potassium phosphate at indicated pH values. Enzymatic activity was measured as H_2O_2 -production (mean of triplicates \pm SD).

C, Sensitivity to increasing amounts of urea: Dialyzed ink (black bars, 1/500 diluted) and as positive control 0,625 mM α -keto isocaproic acid (open bars) were treated with indicated concentrations of urea for 30 min at 25°C. Enzymatic activity (15 min, 25°C) was measured as α -keto acid formation via MBTH.

Figure 4

A, N-terminal and internal peptide sequences of the APIT protein.

B, List of oligonucleotides used for cloning of the APIT gene.

- 32 -

C, Nucleotide sequence of the APIT cDNA and the derived amino acid sequence. The dinucleotide binding fold (VAVVGAGPGGANSAYMLRDSG LDI~~AV~~FE) and the GG-motif (RVGGRLFT) are indicated by boxes. Consensus amino acid residues are indicated by bold letters. The N-terminal sequence of mature APIT (dashed line) and of internal peptides (solid line) derived by Edman degradation and mass finger prints are indicated. Sequence variations of the three clones are indicated by small boxes.

10 D, Variation of the N-terminus of APIT in 11 further clones.

Figure 5

15 A, Anion exchange chromatography of purified APIT. Proteins were eluted by a linear gradient from 0 to 800 mM NaCl and fractions were collected every minute. Absorption was measured at 280 nm (AU: Absorption unit).

B, Fractions 24, 27 and 29 were separated by SDS-PAGE and tested for metabolic activity by WST-1 assay. High activity (+; + +) correlated with the presence of a prominent 60 kDa band (fractions 24 and 29). Activity is given as the dilution leading to > 85% reduction of the metabolic activity of Jurkat cells (+/- = 1:900; + = 1:2700; + + = 1:8100).

25 C, Absorption spectra of fractions 24 (black line), 27 (dashed line) and 29 (dotted line).

Figure 6

30 A, APIT induced H₂O₂ production in medium in the absence of cells. APIT (260 ng/ml) was incubated in medium in the presence (open bar) or absence (black bar) of Jurkat cells (5x10⁵/ml). After 1 h of incubation at

- 33 -

37°C supernatants were alkylated with N-ethylmaleimide and H₂O₂ was measured (mean values of 3 independent experiments +/- SD).

5 B, Catalase inhibits ink induced cell death. Jurkat T-cells were incubated for 8 h with ink in the presence (black bars) or absence (white bars) of catalase. Cytotoxicity was measured as PI uptake (mean of triplicates ± SD).

10 C, Catalase protects from APIT induced loss of metabolic activity. Metabolic activity of Jurkat cells was measured after incubation with APIT (20 ng/ml) or anti-CD95 for 3h in the presence (black bars) or absence (white bars) of catalase. (mean of 5 replicates ± SD).

15 D, Phenotype of APIT induced cell death is mediated by hydrogen peroxide. Jurkat cells were cultured for 7 hours in the presence (APIT) or absence (medium) of APIT (60 ng/ml) or H₂O₂ (500 μM) and were analyzed by phase contrast microscopy. Catalase was added in combination with APIT to neutralize H₂O₂ (APIT + CAT).

20 E, Long-term exposure with ink from *Aplysia punctata* and catalase resulted in tumor cell death by amino acid deprivation. Metabolic activity of Jurkat T-cells was measured after overnight incubation (>18h) with ink (white bars) or H₂O₂ (250 μM, black bars) in the presence (+) or absence (-) of catalase (2000 U/ml) (mean of triplicates ± SD).

25

Figure 7

30 A, Enzymatic activity of APIT in the presence of different medium supplements. APIT (200 ng/ml) was incubated for 60 min at RT with RPMI +/- 10% FCS or KRG supplemented with different medium ingredients and H₂O₂ production was measured. (EAA = essential amino acids, NEAA = non essential amino acids, concentrations see Table 1).

- 34 -

B, Substrate specificity of APIT and ink. The enzymatic reaction of dialysed ink (open bars) with different L-amino acids in potassium phosphate buffer was measured as H_2O_2 -production. $50 \mu\text{M}$ H_2O_2 and amino acid free medium (control) were used as control. Aliquots of dialyzed ink were
5 digested with trypsin (hatched bars) or proteinase K (black bars) at 37°C for 2h prior to testing the substrate specificity. Arg = L-arginine, 1mM; Lys = L-lysine, 1mM; EAA = essential amino acids, 1mM; NEAA = non essential amino acids, 1mM.

10 **C**, APIT induced cell death depends on the presence of L-lysine or L-arginine. Jurkat cells were incubated with APIT (20 ng/ml) for 6 h in the presence (white bars) or absence of L-lysine and L-arginine (black bars). Cytotoxicity was measured as PI uptake (mean of triplicates \pm SD).

15 **D**, APIT induced loss of metabolic activity depends on the presence of L-lysine or L-arginine. Jurkat cells were incubated with APIT (20 ng/ml) or anti-CD95 (150 ng/ml) in the presence (open bars) or absence (black bars) of L-lysine or L-arginine and metabolic activity was measured (mean of 5 replicates \pm SD).

20 **E**, APIT transforms L-lysine into an α -keto acid. APIT was incubated with L-lysine and the formation of α -keto acid was measured photometrically by its reaction with MBTH.

25 **F**, Michaelis-Menten kinetic of APIT activity with L-lysine. K_m value for L-lysine was determined as H_2O_2 production.

G, Proposed reaction mechanism of L-amino acid oxidases according to Macheroux et al. (2001 Eur. J. Biochem. 268:1679-1686). Encircled are
30 compounds which we demonstrated to participate in the reaction catalyzed by APIT.

- 35 -

Figure 8

A, Quantification of the mRNAs of Lamin A/C and Prx I after transfection of specific siRNA (open bars) and control Luciferase siRNA (black bars) with quantitative realtime PCR. Shown are the relative mRNAs levels compared to the mRNA of GAPDH measured in the same RNA preparation.

B, Sensitization of HeLa cells by knock down of Prx I. Specific siRNAs directed against the mRNA of Luciferase (Luc, transfection control), Lamin A/C (control knock down) and Prx I were transfected in HeLa cells and the metabolic activity of transfectants treated in the presence (black bars) or absence of APIT (open bars) was measured. Note that the knock down of Prx I but not of the other genes sensitized cells for the cytotoxic activity of APIT.

Figure 9

APIT did not induce actin depolymerisation in HeLa cells. Untreated HeLa cells (A) and HeLa cells treated with Cytochalasin (B) or APIT (C) were stained with Phalloidin-TRITC for actin and Hoechst 33258 for nuclei staining. Subsequently, fluorescence microscopy was performed. Actin staining is shown in bright white, nuclei are displayed in transient grey.

Figure 10

HUVEC cells are resistant to the APIT induced cells death. HUVEC and Jurkat cells were incubated with APIT over night and subsequently LDH release in the culture supernatant was measure photometrically. Shown are the results of two independent experiments +/- standard deviation.

- 36 -

Table 1

Composition and concentrations of mixtures of essential and non-essential amino acids as well as single amino acids used in Fig. 7A.

5 **Table 2**

APIT kills different kinds of tumor cells. Different tumor cell lines (50,000 cells in 100 μ l) were incubated for 14 h in the presence of increasing amounts of APIT. Metabolic activity of the cells was measured via turnover of WST. The IC₅₀ values reflect the APIT concentration at which the
10 metabolic activity is decreased to 50%. (* stands for IC₅₀ \geq 20 ng/ml at the given cell concentration of 50,000/100 μ l.)

Table 3

List of proteins which were changed in their expression or modified after
15 treatment with APIT (upregulation (+), downregulation (-), or modification (m) in column "effect"). The proteins are referenced by the genbank identifier and/or accession number and/or version number.

Table 4 and Table 5

20 List of genes (referenced by unigene cluster number) and gene products (proteins) which were modulated in their expression more than 2 fold after incubation with APIT for two hours. The proteins are referenced by the genbank identifier and/or accession number. Transcription rates are indicated as increase (+, 2 to \leq 4 times; ++, 4 to 6 times in Table 4 or
25 4 to 25 times in Table 5) or decrease (-, 2 to \leq 4 times; --, 4 to 6 times).

Example 1: Purification of APIT

Aplysia punctata were gained from the Station Biologique Roscoff,
30 Bretagne, France. Crude ink was prepared by gentle squeezing the sea hares in sterile seawater. Insoluble particles were removed by

- 37 -

ultracentrifugation (82,000g, 30 min, 4 °C) and supernatants were stored at -70 °C.

APIT was purified from crude ink via anion exchange chromatography and
5 gelfiltration. The thawed ink was filtered through Whatman filter No. 4 under slight vacuum and subsequently through a 5 μ m and 0.45 μ m syringe filter. The filtrate was concentrated by using Ultrafree-15 Units (Millipore, exclusion weight 30 kDa) followed by three washing steps with 20 mM Tris HCl (pH 8.2). After centrifugation at 10.000 g for 5 min the
10 supernatant of the concentrate (20 – 60 fold) was applied to a Source Q15 column ((10mm, length 40 mm) equilibrated with 20 mM Tris HCl, pH 8.2. Proteins were eluted by a linear gradient from 0 to 800 mM NaCl over 50 ml at a flow rate of 2 ml/min (Fig. 1A). The purity of the fractions was determined by SDS-PAGE and subsequent rapid silver staining. APIT
15 appears as a band at 60 kDa. Cytolytic activity was measured as APIT-induced reduction of the metabolic activity of Jurkat cells via turnover of ~~WST~~ (see example 2). Enzymatic activity was determined as described in example 3. Fractions which show high purity and cytotoxic respectively
20 enzymatic activity (Fig. 1A; fraction 42 to 48) were pooled, concentrated and loaded onto a Superose 12 HR 10/30 column (Pharmacia). Proteins were eluted with 100 mM potassium phosphate buffer (pH 7.2) at a flow rate of 0.5 ml/min The first peak represents the active APIT (Fig. 2B; fraction 11 to 14).

25 Example 2: Phenotype of APIT-induced cell death

The purple fluid of *Aplysia punctata* contains a cytolytic activity which induces rapid and extensive death of Jurkat T cells in culture. APIT induces cell death of tumor cells which resembles neither apoptosis nor necrosis. In
30 order to classify the APIT-induced cell death we looked for common features of apoptosis and necrosis.

- 38 -

Jurkat T cells were harvested in the log phase, centrifuged and adjusted to a density of 5×10^5 /ml with fresh medium (RPMI supplemented with 10% FCS, 100 U/ml penicillin and 100 μ g/ml streptomycin). Cells were cultured with APIT, cycloheximide as a positive control or medium at 37°C, 5% CO₂ and 100% humidity for the indicated times. Fragmented DNA of apoptotic cells was analyzed according to Herrmann et al. (1994, Nucleic Acid Research 22: 5506-5507). Cell vitality was determined as metabolic activity via the turnover of WST-1 (ROCHE, Mannheim) to red formazan by the mitochondrial dehydrogenase of viable cells. Absorbance of the cell suspension was measured photometrically at 450 nm (690 nm reference). Toxicity was measured by quantifying propidium iodide uptake (1 μ g/ml in PBS) by Flow Cytometry.

Morphologically, tumor cells treated with ink or APIT did not exhibit typical morphological apoptotic or necrotic signs of cell death (Fig. 2A), and neither blebbing nor swollen cells were detected when cells were treated with a lethal dose of ink. Cells did not form clusters anymore, cytoplasm became translucent and nuclei prominent (Fig. 2A). The intracellular movements of plasma and organelles stopped, detachment and formation of vacuoles were observed when adherent cells were incubated with APIT (data not shown). Consistent with the absence of apoptosis, fragmented DNA or nuclei were not detected in ink-treated tumor cells (Fig. 2 B); moreover, caspases were not activated (data not shown). Metabolic activity of tumor cells was blocked as early as 30 min after exposure to ink or APIT (Fig. 2C). Ink-treated tumor cells rapidly took up propidium iodide (PI) indicating plasma membrane permeabilization and cell death (Fig. 2D).

Example 3: Stability of APIT

APIT was further characterized by its sensitivity to heat, low pH and high concentrations of urea.

- 39 -

For determination of its heat sensitivity native ink was dialyzed against PBS at 4°C for several days to separate chromopeptides. Dialysed ink was incubated for 10 min at the indicated temperatures, and activity was measured immediately as enzymatic production of H₂O₂. This assay is based on the finding that APIT transforms L-lysine to H₂O₂ and α -keto acid. The production of H₂O₂ was determined via the turnover of ABTS (2,2-Azino-bis (3-ethylbenzthiazoline-6-sulfonic acid) to a green formazan in the presence of H₂O₂ by horseradish peroxidase. Heat-treated ink was incubated with L-lysine (1 mM) in 100 μ l 100 mM potassium phosphate buffer, pH 7.2 for 10 min at 25°C. The reaction was stopped by adding 1 μ l of 10 M phosphoric acid. To 25 μ l of this solution 1 mM ABTS and 1 Unit horseradish peroxidase was added in 225 μ l 100 mM potassium phosphate buffer, pH 5.0. Absorption was measured photometrically at 405 nm (reference 690 nm).

Purified APIT was challenged to different pH-values by adding a mixture of monobasic and dibasic potassium phosphate and phosphoric acid rendering the desired pH. After a 10 min incubation pH of samples was adjusted to pH 7.2 by adding appropriate amounts of dibasic phosphate. Afterwards enzymatic activity was measured as H₂O₂-production as described above.

The activity of APIT after treatment with urea was measured via the production of α -keto acid, which was quantified photometrically by its reaction with the hydrazone MBTH (3-methyl-2-benzothiazolone hydrazone hydrochloride) as described by Soda (1968). Dialyzed ink was incubated with urea at indicated concentrations for 30 min. Subsequently the remaining enzymatic activity was measured without removing urea for 15 min at 25°C. As control, defined amounts of α -keto isocaproic acid (Sigma; K-0629) were treated equally.

- 40 -

APIT was characterized by its heat sensitivity and was found to exhibit a high and constant activity after pre-incubation for 10 min at 0 °C to 50 °C. Activity was clearly reduced at 60 °C and absent at temperatures of 70 °C or higher (Fig. 3A). APIT also shows a loss of activity with decreasing pH, with complete inactivation after a 10 min pre-incubation at pH 3 or lower (Fig. 3B). An outstanding feature of APIT is its resistance to urea (Fig. 3C). After 30 min treatment with 6 M urea, the activity of APIT was almost unaffected. At 8 M urea, the activity was reduced by about 50%.

Example 4: Sequencing and cloning of APIT

In order to clone the cDNA of APIT N-terminal and internal peptide sequences were identified by PMF (peptide mass fingerprint), ESI/MS and Edman degradation (Fig. 4A). A suitable internal peptide sequence was used to design a degenerated primer for PCR (Fig. 4A, underlined sequence) with reverse transcribed mRNA, prepared from *Aplysia punctata* tissues. Subsequent 5'-RACE yielded the full length cDNA which was cloned and analyzed.

Amino acid sequencing by peptide mass fingerprint (PMF), ESI/MS and Edman degradation. Purified APIT was separated by SDS PAGE and 2 DE gel electrophoresis (Thiede et al., 2001, J. Biol. Chem. 276: 26044-26050). The N-terminus of APIT was identified from a single band/spot of a PVDF blot by Edmann degradation. For the identification of internal peptide sequences a single band/spot was punched from the gel, digested with trypsin and dissolved in aqueous trifluoroacetic acid (Thiede et al., 2001, J. Biol. Chem. 276:26044-26050). Tryptic peptides were separated using a Smart-HPLC system with a column of 2.1 mm inner diameter and 10 cm length (μ RPC C2/C18 SC 2.1/10, Smart System, Pharmacia Biotech, Freiburg, Germany) and an acetonitrile gradient in 0.1 % (v/v) trifluoroacetic acid at a flow rate of 100 μ l/min at room temperature. The peptide fractions were dried, dissolved in 6 μ l 0.3% (v/v) aqueous trifluoroacetic

- 41 -

acid/acetonitrile (2:1) and analyzed by MALDI-MS. The mass spectra were recorded by using a time-of-flight delayed extraction MALDI mass spectrometer (Voyager-Elite, Perseptive Biosystems, Framingham, MA, USA) as previously described (Thiede et al., 2001, J. Biol. Chem. 276:26044-26050). Briefly, fifty mg/ml 2,5-dihydroxybenzoic acid in 0.3% (v/v) aqueous trifluoroacetic acid/acetonitrile (2:1) was used as matrix and 0.3 μ l of the sample and 0.3 μ l of the matrix were mixed and applied to a gold-plated sample holder and introduced into the mass spectrometer after drying. The spectra were obtained in the reflectron mode by summing 50-150 laser shots. For N-terminal sequencing peptide fractions containing single masses were loaded onto a Biobrene-coated glass fiber filter, transferred to a PVDF membrane and excised. Sequencing was performed using a Procise sequencer (Applied Biosystems, Weiterstadt, Germany).

Cloning of the APIT gene. In order to dissect mantle gland, nidadamental gland, digestive gland and opaline gland some animals were relaxed by injection of 5 – 10 ml sterile MgCl_2 solution (380 mM). Isolated tissues were frozen immediately in liquid nitrogen. Total RNA was prepared from these tissues using the „peq gold TRIfast“ reagent (Peqlab). mRNA was reverse transcribed using the tagged oligo dT oligonucleotide 5'-tcc taa cgt agg tct aga cct gtt gca t₍₁₈₎-3' (Fig. 4B, oligo 1) and the Superscript II polymerase (LIFE) at 42 °C. In order to amplify a fragment of the APIT gene the degenerated primer 5'-tc gtg ttc gar tac tci gay cg-3' derived from the APIT peptide VFEYSDR (Fig. 4B, oligo 2) and the specific primer 5'- ctg tag gtc tag acc tgt tgc a-3' (Fig. 4B, oligo 3) directed against the tag sequence of the oligo dT-primer was used. PCR was performed with the „expand long template“ system (ROCHE, Mannheim) at 68 °C and the product was cloned into the pCMV-vector (Stratgene) and sequenced. The 5' terminal cDNA of APIT was cloned using the 5' RACE System (LIFE) according to the manufacturers instructions. Primers 5'-ccg tgt aga tct cac tgc cat a-3' (Fig. 4B, oligo 4) or 5'-ccg ttg agt tgt aga cct-3 (Fig. 4B, oligo 6) were combined with the primers 5'-ggc cac gcg tgc act agt acg ggi igg gii ggg

- 42 -

iig-3' (Fig. 4B, oligo 5) or 5'-aatt ggc cac gcg tcg act agt ac-3' (Fig. 4B, oligo 7) to yield a product which was cloned into the pCDNA3-vector (Invitrogen) and sequenced. Finally, full length APIT cDNA was obtained by amplifying the APIT using the specific primers 5' – aa ttc tcg tct gct gtg ctt ctc ct (Fig. 4B, oligo 8) and 5' – gac tta gag gaa gta gtc gtt ga (Fig. 4B, oligo 9) and cloned into the pGEX-4T3 Vector (Amersham). DNA from 3 clones of transfected E.coli was prepared and sequenced.

The identity of the isolated gene was confirmed by comparing the computed translational product (Fig. 4C) with the amino acid sequences of the tryptic peptides (Fig. 4A) and the peptide mass fingerprint. It consisted of 1608 bp coding for a protein of 535 amino acids (Fig. 4C) with the predicted mass of 60,167 dalton and a pI of 4.59. The N-terminal 18 amino acids of APIT comprised a putative secretion signal sequence which was absent from the mature protein, most likely due to posttranslational modification during secretion. Furthermore, APIT exhibited homology to FAD-binding oxidoreductases with a conserved dinucleotide binding fold around amino acids 39 to 66 followed by a so-called GG-motif typical for certain oxidases like LAAO, MAO (Fig. 4C) (Dailey et al., 1998, J.Biol. Chem. 273:13658-13662; Vallon et al., 2000, Proteins 38:95-114; Macheroux et al., 2001 Eur. J. Biochem. 268:1679-1686). The highest degree of homology existed to the Cyplasin from *A. punctata*, the Aplysianin from *A. kurodai* and the mucus-toxin of the giant African snail *Achatina fulica*.

Comparing the 3 derived DNA-sequences we often found differences in the third position of coding triplets which nevertheless only seldom produced changes in the amino acid sequence of APIT (Fig. 4C).

By the method described above, further 11 clones were isolated from *Aplysia punctata* which have a homology to the sequences described in Fig. 4 of at least 95%. Several mutations of the amino acid sequence were

- 43 -

found in the domain comprising the dinucleotide binding fold and the GG motif, which probably have no effect upon the function (Fig. 4D). In Pos. 22 of SEQ ID NO: 2, C is replaced by S in two clones. In Pos. 52, A is replaced by T in one clone. In Pos. 60, L is replaced by Q in 7 clones. In Pos. 69, D is replaced by H in one clone. In Pos. 77, T is replaced by S in one clone.

Example 5: FAD association

The toxic and enzymatic activity of APIT is due to the presence of an attached FAD.

In order to purify the tumor lytic activity, ink from *A. punctata* was subjected to different purification protocols and afterwards each fraction was tested for its toxic activity (see example 1). Activity always correlated with the presence of a protein of approximately 60 kDa (Fig. 5 A and B). Moreover, APIT was found to contain carbohydrate residues using the DIG Glycan/Protein double labeling method (Roche; data not shown). Furthermore, all spectra of the highly active fractions exhibited a double peak at 390/470 nm (Fig. 5C) which is characteristic for protein bound flavines (Massey et al., 2000, Biochem Soc. Trans. 28:283-96). Heating of APIT for 10 min to 60°C, which is accompanied by a substantial loss of activity also results in loss of detectable FAD-absorption, as is the case with lowering the pH to inactivating values around pH 3. Heating and pH-challenge of APIT was performed as described in example 3 (data not shown).

Consistently, APIT contained the conserved dinucleotide binding fold involved in pyrophosphate binding (Wierenga et al., 1986, J. Mol. Biol., 187:101-107) which is found in many flavoproteins (Fig. 4B; example 4). Moreover, in APIT like in many oxidases a so-called GG-motif is found adjacent to the dinucleotide binding fold (Dailey et al., 1998, J. Biol.

- 44 -

Chem. 273:13658-13662, Vallon et al., 2000, Proteins, 38:95-114). Based on the structure of the dinucleotide binding fold and conserved sequence motifs, FAD containing proteins are ordered into 4 families (Dym et al., 2001, Protein Sci. 10:1712-28). According to this classification and
5 based on homology APIT belongs to the Glutathione reductase 2 family (GR2) (Dym et al., 2001, Protein Sci. 10:1712-28). The data show that FAD is a necessary prosthetic group for toxic and enzymatic activity of APIT.

10 Example 6: Cell-death is mediated via H_2O_2

Proteome analysis revealed that thioredoxin peroxidase II is involved in the APIT mediated tumor cell death. Thioredoxinperoxidase II is involved in detoxification of reactive oxygen species (ROS) by reducing hydrogen
15 peroxides as well as other peroxides. We therefore tested whether H_2O_2 is produced during APIT incubation and found that H_2O_2 is the mediator of APIT-induced cell death. Scavenging this toxic compound by catalase over a certain period of time (6-8 hours) results in survival of APIT treated cells. Notable long-term exposure of tumor cells (>18 hours) with APIT and
20 catalase causes the death of tumor cells by the deprivation of L-lysine and L-arginine.

H_2O_2 production was measured after incubation of APIT in medium alone and in cell suspension as described in example 3. Toxicity was measured
25 by quantifying propidium iodide uptake ($1 \mu\text{g/ml}$ in PBS) by Flow Cytometry. Cell vitality was determined as metabolic activity via the turnover of WST-1 (ROCHE, Mannheim) to red formazan by the mitochondrial dehydrogenase of viable cells. Absorbance of the cell suspension was measured photometrically at 450 nm (690 nm reference).

30

As shown in Fig. 6A, APIT induced the production of H_2O_2 in the presence ($167 \mu\text{M}$) as well as in absence of cells ($280 \mu\text{M}$). This strongly argues for

- 45 -

an enzymatic activity of APIT which transforms medium ingredients under the production of hydrogen peroxide. In the presence of cells the measured H_2O_2 amount is somewhat lower which might be explained by cellular consumption and degradation of H_2O_2 . In the absence of APIT H_2O_2 was not detectable. To investigate whether the APIT-induced cell death is mediated by H_2O_2 , cells were treated with APIT in the presence of the H_2O_2 degrading enzyme catalase and then stained with PI. Catalase completely abolished the ink-induced increase of PI stained cells (Fig. 6B). Degradation of H_2O_2 by catalase also inhibited the rapid break-down of metabolic activity induced by APIT (Fig. 6C) but, as expected, was ineffective in blocking CD95 (Fas/Apo-1)-induced cell death in the same assay (Fig. 6C). In the presence of catalase APIT no longer induced morphological changes of tumor cells as judged by microscopic investigation (Fig. 6D). The highly efficient inhibition by catalase in particular suggested that no other substance than H_2O_2 elicits the toxic effect observed in APIT-treated samples. Consistently, H_2O_2 induced the phenotype typical for APIT-treated cells (Fig. 6D). Furthermore, proteome analyses revealed changes in H_2O_2 treated cells which were characteristic of APIT-treated cells. These data together clearly demonstrated that the cytotoxic activity depended on the H_2O_2 producing enzymatic activity of APIT.

Long-term exposure of Jurkat cells to ink from *Aplysia punctata* in combination with catalase resulted in metabolic activity being decreased to 20% (Fig. 6 E, right panel, white bar). The same result is achieved by treatment with purified APIT in combination with catalase (not shown). Since catalase was effective in inhibiting the H_2O_2 -induced loss of metabolic activity completely (Fig. 6E, right panel, black bar), it was concluded that long-term treatment with APIT in the presence of an H_2O_2 scavenger, such as catalase, kills tumor cells not by the remaining low H_2O_2 concentrations but by the deprivation of L-lysine and L-arginine.

- 46 -

Example 7: APIT is a L-lysine/L-arginine a-oxidase. Enzymatic activity is a prerequisite for toxicity

APIT produced H_2O_2 in RPMI medium in the absence of cells. In order to identify the substrates in cell culture medium which are converted to H_2O_2 by APIT, we prepared different media with defined amino acid composition by supplementing HEPES buffered modified Krebs Ringer medium (KRG: 25 mM HEPES pH 7.4, 125 mM NaCl, 5 mM KCl, 1.2 mM KH_2PO_4 , 5 mM $NaHCO_3$, 6 mM glucose, 1.2 mM $MgSO_4$, 1 mM $CaCl_2$) with 10% FCS, 2 mM glutamine, essential and non-essential amino acids (Invitrogen), or single essential amino acids in concentrations equivalent to RPMI medium (Invitrogen). Media were adjusted to pH 7.4 and filter sterilized. After incubation of these media with purified APIT the enzymatic activity was measured as H_2O_2 production via turnover of ABTS (2,2-Azino-bis (3-ethylbenzthiazoline-6-sulfonic acid) to a green formazan in the presence of H_2O_2 and horseradish peroxidase (Fig. 7A and Table 1).

In a next step we checked whether the substrate specificity could be impaired by digest of APIT. For proteolytic digest aliquots of dialysed ink were treated for 2 h with proteinase K (0,05 mg/ml final) in PBS at 37° C. Reaction was stopped by adding aprotinin (1 μ g/ml final) or PEFA ([4-(2-aminoethyl)-benzolsulfonyl fluoride-hydrochloride]-hydrochloride; 0,25 mg/ml final), and digest was checked on a 15% SDS-PAGE. After incubation of digested ink with different amino acid compositions in potassium phosphate buffer the enzymatic activity was measured as H_2O_2 production (Fig. 7B).

In order to test whether withdrawal of L-lysine and L-arginine results in rescue of APIT-treated cells we incubated Jurkat cells in medium lacking L-lysine and L-arginine. Control cells were cultured in a medium containing L-lysine(HCl (40 mg/l) and L-arginine(HCl (240 mg/l). Toxicity was

- 47 -

measured by quantifying propidium iodide uptake ($1 \mu\text{g/ml}$ in PBS) by Flow Cytometry (Fig. 7C).

5 Cell vitality was determined as metabolic activity via the turnover of WST-1 (ROCHE, Mannheim) to red formazan by the mitochondrial dehydrogenase of viable cells. Absorbance of the cell suspension was measured photometrically at 450 nm (690 nm reference). As control tumor cells were killed by anti-CD95 treatment (Fig. 7D).

10 α -Keto acids were quantified photometrically by their reaction with the hydrazone MBTH (3-methyl-2-benzothiazolone hydrazone hydrochloride) as described (Soda et al., 1968, Anal. Biochem. 25:228-235) (Fig. 7E).

15 The K_m value for L-lysine was determined as H_2O_2 production and calculated according to Michaelis Menten with the GraphPad Prism 3.0 software (GraphPad Software, San Diego California USA) using non linear regression (Fig. 7F).

20 Surprisingly, from all amino acids tested only L-lysine and L-arginine served as substrates for APIT to produce hydrogen peroxide (Fig. 7A). Moreover, the restricted substrate specificity was even maintained when APIT was digested with protease K suggesting that the protease resistant fragment of APIT contains both, the active domain and the domain which determines the substrate specificity (Fig. 7B). These data were confirmed by functional
25 analyses which showed that APIT was unable to induce cell death (Fig. 7C) or reduce metabolic activity (Fig. 7D) in tumor cells incubated in medium lacking L-lysine and L-arginine, indicating that the enzymatic activity of APIT is the prerequisite for its toxicity. L-lysine and L-arginine deprivation had no influence on the metabolic activity of tumor cells under the
30 experimental conditions (Fig. 7D). Activation of CD95(Fas/Apo-1) efficiently impaired cell vitality irrespective of the presence of L-lysine or

- 48 -

L-arginine (Fig. 7D), demonstrating that cell death can be induced under L-lysine and L-arginine limited conditions.

As shown in the reaction scheme in figure 7G, α -keto derivatives are produced by amino acid oxidases and these could indeed be demonstrated when L-lysine was used as substrate for APIT (Fig. 7E). These results suggested that APIT catalyses the formation of H_2O_2 by the reaction outlined in figure 7G. Kinetic studies analyzed according to Michaelis-Menten revealed a K_m of 0.182 mM for L-lysine (Fig. 7F).

By adding L-lysine (2-50 μ g/ml) to tumor cells which are cultured with APIT (20 ng/ml) in medium depleted of L-lysine and L-arginine or in pure FCS, the metabolic activity of the tumor cells can be reduced down to 16% respectively 50% of the control cells without additional L-lysine. This shows that the tumorolytic effect of APIT can be manipulated by changing the amount of available substrate which is of significance for *in vivo* studies and/or for application of APIT in pharmaceutical compositions and/or methods for treatment of cancer.

Example 8: Sensitivity of different tumor cell lines to APIT induced cell death.

Tumor cells were harvested in the log phase. Triplicates of each 50,000 cells were cultured in a flat bottomed 96-well-plate in 100 μ l medium with increasing concentrations of APIT. After 14 hours the metabolic activity of the cells was determined by addition of 10 μ l WST-1 per well (ROCHE, Mannheim). The yellow tetrazolium salt is cleaved to red formazan by cellular enzymes of viable cells. The metabolic activity correlates with cell vitality and was quantified by measuring the absorbance of the dye solution with a spectrophotometer at 450 nm (reference 650 nm).

- 49 -

APIT is able to kill different tumor cells. T and B cell leukemia cell lines (Jurkat neo, CEM neo, SKW neo), a chronic myelogenous leukemia cell line (K562), and cells from an orphan and aggressive osteosarcoma (Ewings tumor: RDES, A673) showed the highest sensitivity to the APIT induced cell death ($IC_{50} \leq 5.6$ ng/ml), followed by cells derived from small cell lung cancer (GLC4, GLC4/ADR), cervix cancer (Chang) and acute monocytic leukemia (THP-1) ($IC_{50} \leq 10$ ng/ml). Most of the adherent growing cells of solid tumors (breast cancer: MCF-7, SK-BR-3; prostate cancer: PC3, DU-145; colon cancer: HT-29; cervix cancer: HeLa; uterus cancer: Hec-1-B; larynx cancer HEp-2; stomach cancer: AGS; liver cancer: Hep G2) and the monocyte leukemia cell line MonoMac 6 are less sensitive at the indicated cell concentration ($IC_{50} \leq 20$ ng/ml), but become more sensitive when lower cell concentrations were used (IC_{50} 5 - 10 ng/ml).

Resistance to apoptosis as well as multi drug resistance (MDR) represent severe problems in cancer therapy. It is therefore of particular interest that APIT kills apoptosis resistant cell lines as well as MDR cancer cell lines equally efficient as their non resistant counter parts (Tab. 2): Over-expression of apoptosis inhibitors of the Bcl-2 family in acute lymphoblastic leukemia cell lines (CEM Bcl-X_L, Jurkat Bcl-2) as well as in B cell leukemia (SKW Bcl-2) (Tab. 2; 4th row) does not protect from APIT mediated cell death and results in IC_{50} values of ≤ 6 ng/ml, similar to the non-transfected parental cell lines, confirming that APIT induce cell death in an apoptosis independent way. The MDR cell line GLC4/ADR (Tab. 2, 5th row) was generated by selection with doxorubicin (Zijlstra et al., 1987, Cancer Res. 47:1780-1784). Its multifactorial MDR is caused by over-expression of MRP-1 and a decreased activity of the DNA topoisomerase II. GLC4/ADR cells possess almost the same sensitivity to APIT (IC_{50} 10 ng/ml) as the parental line GLC4 does (IC_{50} 9 ng/ml).

- 50 -

Example 9: Proteome analysis: change in protein expression pattern in Jurkat T cells after treatment with APIT

Treatment with APIT. Jurkat T cells (5×10^5 /ml) were incubated with APIT (20 ng/ml) for 8 h at 37 °C in 5.0% CO₂ in the presence of 1 µg/ml cycloheximide. Controls were performed without APIT.

Total cell lysate. The Jurkat T cells were solubilized in 5 volumes of a buffer containing 9 M urea, 25 mM Tris/HCl, pH 7.1, 50 mM KCl, 3 mM EDTA, 70 mM DTT, 2.9 mM benzamidine, 2.1 µM leupeptin, 0.1 µM pepstatin, 1 mM PMSF, and 2% carrier ampholytes (Servalyte pH 2-4, Serva, Heidelberg, Germany). After 30 minutes of gentle stirring at room temperature, the samples were centrifuged at 100000 g (Ultracentrifuge Optima TLX, Beckman, München, Germany) for 30 minutes with a TLA120.2 rotor, which were kept at room temperature before centrifugation. The clear supernatant was frozen at -70 °C.

Proteomics. The methods of preparing 2-DE gels, staining with Coomassie Blue G-250, staining with silver nitrate, in-gel tryptic digestion, peptide mass fingerprinting by MALDI-MS, and identification of the proteins are described in Jungblut et al., Molecular Microbiology, 2000, 36, 710-725.

Identification was performed using the peptide mass fingerprinting analysis software MS-Fit (<http://prospector.ucsf.edu/ucsfhtml3.2/msfit.htm>) or ProFound (<http://canada.proteometrics.com/prowl-cgi/ProFound.exe?FORM=1>). Searches were performed in the databases NCBI nr and SwissProt. The proteins are referenced by the genbank identifier, accession number and/or version number.

Results. APIT induces either upregulation, downregulation, or modification of the proteins. Modification in the context of this example is a change in the apparent mass and/or the apparent pI value of the protein. By

- 51 -

comparison of 2-DE patterns of APIT-treated whole cell lysates with the corresponding patterns of untreated cells, the proteins as described in Table 3 were identified to be affected by APIT.

5 **Example 10: Transcriptome analysis**

The influence of APIT on the gene expression of tumor cells was investigated by Microarray technology.

10 ***In situ* Oligonucleotide Arrays.** A custom oligonucleotide glass array of specific 60mer oligonucleotides representing the mRNA of about 8500 human genes was designed based on human Unigene clusters (Unigene build No. 148) including positive and negative control oligonucleotides (*Homo sapiens* house keeping genes and *Arabidopsis thaliana* genes
15 respectively). The probe design included a base composition filter and a homology search to minimise cross-hybridisation.

RNA isolation, labelling and hybridisation to arrays. Jurkat neo cells (1×10^7 in 20 ml) were cultured for 2 hours in medium (RPMI + 10 % FCS) in the
20 presence or absence of APIT (10 ng/ml) at 37°C, 5% CO₂. Cells were harvested and the pellet was dissolved in 2 ml Trizol (Life Technologies). Total RNA was extracted after addition of chloroform and subsequent centrifugation and precipitated with isopropanol. After washing the pellet with 75% ethanol it was briefly air-dried. Quality control of the RNA
25 included exclusion of genomic DNA by PCR and "Lab on a chip technology" (Bioanalyser). RNA (5 µg) from each pool was amplified using a reverse transcriptase/T7 polymerase. 1.5 µg of test cRNAs labelled either with Cy3 or Cy5 were hybridised for 16 hours at 65°C to arrays. Each sample was also labelled and hybridised with the reverse fluorophore to
30 obviate possible dye bias. Slides were scanned using a Microarray scanner. Background signal was determined using negative control spots and

- 52 -

subtracted, data were normalised relative to non-regulated genes. Data from duplicate hybridizations were combined.

Results. Tables 4 and 5 summarize the genes with increased or decreased transcription rate of treated cells compared with untreated cells, indicating these genes and/or its gene products (proteins) to be targets of APIT and/or H₂O₂.

Example 11: Knock down of Prx I sensitized tumor cells for APIT induced cell death

Peroxiredoxin I (Prx I) exhibited the most significant modification observed in 2-DE protein patterns of APIT treated cells in comparison to untreated Jurkat cells (Table 3) . The modification of Prx I which is observed in 2-DE gel analysis of APIT treated cells resembles that described for the oxidized and inactivated Prx I, indicating that APIT inactivates this detoxification system. In order to investigate the role of Prx I for the APIT induced cell death we performed knock down of Prx I expression by RNA interference (RNAi). If Prx I was involved in the detoxification of H₂O₂ produced by APIT, we expected to observe a sensitization in cells in which Prx I expression is decreased.

Therefore, 20.000 HeLa cells/well were seeded in a 96 well plate one day prior to transfection. Transfection was performed with 0.25 µg siRNA directed against

Prx I having the sequence (SEQ ID NO: 9):

5' -GGCUGAUGAAGGCAUCUCGdTdT-3'
3' -dTdTCCGACUACUCCGUAGAGC-5' ,

Lamin A/C having the sequence (SEQ ID NO: 30):

5' -CUGGACUCCAGAAGAACAAdTdT
3' -dTdTGACCUGAAGGUCUUCUUGU-5' ,

and Luciferase having the sequence (SEQ ID NO: 31):

5' -CUUACGCUGAGUACUUCGAdTdT-3'
3' -dTdTGA AUGCGACUCAUGAAGCU-5' ,

- 53 -

as control and 2 μ l transmessenger per well using the transmessenger transfection kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany) according to manufacturers instructions. For APIT treatment (40ng/ml) transfections were conducted in triplicates. 24 h after transfection cells were splitted and grown for additional 48 h before fresh medium with or without APIT was added for 6h. Assay conditions which led to a 50 to 70 % reduction of the metabolic activity of treated cells were chosen for RNAi experiments. Metabolic activity was determined as described in Example 2. In parallel, RNA from about 50.000 cells was isolated using the RNeasy 96 BioRobot 8000 system (Qiagen) 48 h after transfection. The relative amount of mRNA was determined by realtime PCR using QuantitectTM SYBR Green RT-PCR Kit from Qiagen following manufacturers instructions. The expression level of Prx mRNA was normalised against the internal standard GAPDH. The following primers were used: Prx I 5': CTGTTATGCCAGATGGTCAG, Prx I 3': GATACCAAAGGAATGTTTCATG, Lamin A/C 5':CAAGAAGGAGGGTGACCTGA, Lamin A/C 3':GCATCTCATCCTGAAGTTGCTT, GAPDH 5':GGTATCGTGGAAGGACTCATGAC, GAPDH 3':ATGCCAGTGAGCTTCCCGTTTCAG.

To measure sensitization, conditions were chosen under which the reduction of metabolic activity of treated cells was 50 % or less of the untreated cells. siRNAs were transfected into HeLa cells and after 72 h cells were treated with APIT for 6 h and metabolic activity was determined. In parallel, cells were harvested for quantitative analysis of the respective mRNAs by realtime PCR (Fig. 8 A). The mRNA of Prx I was reduced by more than 90 % compared to the mRNA level of GAPDH. Interestingly, this reduction of Prx I expression significantly sensitized the cells for killing by APIT whereas control siRNA directed against Luciferase and Lamin A/C had no effect (Fig. 8 B). Our data show that knock down of Prx I by RNAi rendered the cells hypersensitive for APIT suggesting that Prx I is part of an H₂O₂ detoxifying pathway which is modulated by APIT.

- 54 -

In summary, we identified the modification of Prx I, as an important step in the APIT of this detoxification system. The fact that the knock down of Prx I expression by RNAi increased the sensitivity of tumor cells for the cytolytic activity of APIT underlines the impact of Prx 1 RNA interference
5 for cancer therapy.

Example 12: APIT does not induce actin depolymerisation

Cyplasin S and L, proteins from *Aplysia punctata* which induce cell death
10 of tumor cells were described to cause fast actin depolymerisation in human tumor cells (see WO 03/057726). The influence of APIT treatment on actin filaments by fluorescence staining of actin by Phalloidin-TRITC (Tetramethylrhodamin- isothiocyanat) is investigated.

15 HeLa cells (1.5×10^5 cells/well/ml) were cultured over night on cover slips in 12 well plates. Subsequently, cells were incubated in the presence or absence of APIT (40 ng/ml) for 6 h or Cytochalasin D ($1 \mu\text{M}$; Sigma 8273) for 30 min. After washing in PBS, cells on cover slips were fixed for 10 min in 3,7 % PFA (paraformaldehyde), washed again and finally
20 permeabilized by a 1 min incubation in 0,5 % Triton X-100. Blocking of unspecific binding sites by incubation in PBS, 1% FCS, 0,05 % Tween 20 was followed by actin staining with Phalloidin-TRITC in blocking puffer for 15 min and 3 fold washing. Nuclei were stained by the presence of Hoechst 33258 in the last washing step. Cover slips were investigated by
25 fluorescence microscopy.

As shown in Fig. 9 untreated cells (A) possess a typical actin cytoskeleton. Incubation in the presence of Cytochalasin (B), an inducer of rapid actin depolymerisation, resulted in a massive loss of actin filaments and an
30 accumulation of actin in clumps. In contrast, APIT(C) did not induce actin depolymerisation in HeLa cells. APIT treated cells remain their actin filaments, even after 6 h when the plasma membrane was already

- 55 -

disrupted (see example 2, Fig. 2D). This clearly differentiates APIT induced cell death from that induced by Cyplasins.

Example 13: Healthy human cells are resistant against the APIT-induced cell death

5

To analyze the specificity of APIT for tumor cells, normal human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVEC) and tumor cells (Jurkat cells) were incubated with increasing amounts of purified APIT and analyzed for lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) release (Fig. 10).

10

HUVEC and Jurkat cells (50,000 cells/100 μ l/wells) were treated with increasing amounts of APIT in a 96 well plate. After over night incubation half of the culture supernatants (50 μ l) were transferred in fresh wells and mixed with 50 μ l reagent of Cytotoxicity Detection Kit-LDH according to the manufacturers instruction (Roche 1644793). Release of LDH in the supernatant is found only, when cells were killed by APIT. LDH release was calculated as the ratio of LDH activity of APIT treated cells relative to the LDH activity of Triton X 100 lysed cells.

15

20

Jurkat cells showed a dramatic release of LDH upon incubation with APIT (Fig. 10). In contrast, even at the highest APIT concentrations used in this experiments (40 ng/ml), APIT treated HUVEC cells only showed a minor LDH release below 10 %, indicating a strong resistance of these normal cells against the cytolytic activity of APIT. As several tumor cell lines showed a similar APIT sensitivity as the Jurkat cells (Table 2), the data suggest the toxic effect induced by APIT is tumor specific.

25